

# Factors Responsible for Heroin Addiction in Azad Kashmir and Islamabad

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## Abstract

Heroin abuse causes significant mortality in the world and appears to be the most difficult addiction to treat and recover from. The aim of this investigation is to provide knowledge about causes of heroin addiction at individual, familial and societal level in Azad Kashmir and Islamabad. A qualitative research design was employed to achieve the objective of the present study. Participants were selected using purposive sampling technique. Data was gathered through in-depth interviews from 20 heroin addicts aged between 15 to 20 years. 10 informants were selected from 'Drug Rehabilitation Center Muzaffarabad, Azad Kashmir' while other 10 were selected from 'Hosla Medical Center Islamabad'. Thematic analysis was applied to analyze data. Stress, curiosity, peer group pressure, parental separation or divorce, lack of supervision of family and easy availability of heroin were identified as major contributing factors of heroin. In order to contextualize the causes of heroin addiction present study is supported by family process theory, availability theory and social learning theory.

**Keywords:** Heroin, Causes of heroin addiction, Azad Kashmir, Islamabad.

## Introduction

Drug addiction is a primeval phenomenon. Primitively drug addiction was considered only as an immoral activity but in contemporary epoch it is recognized as psychological and social problem (Hanan et al, 2012). Heroin Addiction can be caused by variety of factors. Foremost fundamental causes of heroin abuse at individual level are trauma, feelings of depression, anxiety, an effort to escape from uncomfortable feelings and pain. Familial factors that can cause drug addiction and drug usage are intra familial stress and lack of parental supervision. Social factor that cause drug addictions include easy availability of drugs within the community, curiosity and influence of peer group (Ekern, 2014).

Heroin addiction is viewed as 'end of the road' drug because it is the most difficult addiction to treat and recuperate. It passes through the blood brain barrier more quickly and easily than other drugs. The effects of heroin are approximately ten times more powerful than morphine (Khan, 1984).

According to Foundation for a Drug-Free World (2016) an estimated 9.2 million people use heroin in the world. A survey was conducted throughout the Pakistan for collecting trustworthy figures regarding prevalence of drug use among the population. According to survey an estimated 860,000 or 0.8 per cent of the population are regular heroin users. In Azad Kashmir total number of heroin users were 16,000 with 0.5 annual prevalence rate (UNODC, 2013).

## Objective

The objective of present study is to explore contributing factors of heroin addiction at personal, familial and societal level.

## Literature Review

Many people incline towards drug abuse as a result of a variety of stresses of their everyday lives. They use drugs as a coping strategy to knock back stress (Hawkins et al.1992). To get rid of pain and stress people sometimes use drugs as a coping mechanism (Khan1999). Trauma and anxiety is one of the major determinants of drug addiction. Adolescents incline towards heroin addiction due to physical and emotional exploitation. To deal with misery and stress due to exploitation they try to find consolation from drugs and later become addicted to it. Consequently teenagers surrounded by stressful situations are particularly more vulnerable to engage in drug addiction. When someone endeavor drugs for the first time to get relief from physical and emotional grief and gets succeed in knocking back stress then the person is expected to consume the substance again. Heroin addiction is initiated by a need to get free from pain, anger, anxiety and sometimes boredom. The individual intended to use drug to confiscate grief and stress but turn out to be a regular addict (Van 2007).

Curiosity is also an important factor to use heroin (Stephens and McBride, 1976). Curiosity trigger individual to endeavor heroin and it is often stimulated by the previous use of other drugs (Parker et al. 1988). Teenagers have novel sensations and stimulation for exploring new ideas. Individuals in teen age develop a sense of independence as a natural process and are ready to experiment innovative activities. They often acknowledge challenges given to them by peers and consider the mysterious stuff including use of alcohol and other drugs (Razavi and Rebecca 1989). Peer group influence adolescent to incline towards drug abuse and heroin is usually employed in the company of peers (Hotter, 1985; Shagufta, 1991). Adolescents who come from broken families are betrayed and encouraged by their peer group in schools and neighborhood to take drugs (Rimfat,

1991). Peer pressure is main factor influencing adolescents for taking drugs (Dean, 1997). Ford (2008) studied the impact of social learning process on drug abuse among youth. He specifically measured the attitudes of peers and family towards drug addiction. He indicated that drug abuse occurs due to the exposure of youth to drugs by their friends; they set their drug abuser friends as their role models and adopt their behavior. He further highlighted that youth having drug abuser parents and peers are more vulnerable to engage in drug addiction. Peers serve as a source of social support and reinforcement for adolescents (Compton and Volkow 2006).

Disruptions in interfamilial relationships were found to be one of the contributing factors of drug abuse (Corrigan 1986). Traumatic experiences, parental absence, strict discipline, communication gap between parents and children, parental use of drugs, absence of family affection push individuals to use drugs in order to relief stress (Anthony, 1985). Children who live in the families with marital conflicts, alcohol and substance use are more likely to suffer from emotional pain and psychological disorders. These children are deprived from love, care and support. When parents fail to provide emotional affection to their children they engage themselves towards drug addiction (Adeniyi 2001). Another most important aspect in escalating the heroin epidemic is easy availability of heroin at cheaper price Despite all the efforts to control drug abuse heroin is still easily available around the world even on cheaper prices (Nemours Foundation, 2004)..

Heroin addiction is spreading in Pakistani society at faster rate due to various factors making it a serious social problem. It is a problem of wider magnitude, deeper intensity and has multiple dimensions. The problem of drug abuse has serious implications for the health and happiness of the individual, his family and society in general. There are very few studies concerning causes of heroin addiction in Pakistan. In our knowledge qualitative research on this particular topic has never been conducted so far in Pakistan. Keeping in view the research gap regarding problem the present study was carried out to find out different causative factors of heroin addiction in Pakistan and Azad Kashmir. The present study will augment additional knowledge in existing world of information relevant to heroin addiction. Findings of the study will help those professionals who are working for narcotics control in Pakistan and will also enable them to develop effective evidence-based strategies and policies that can be applied to control the substance abuse problem.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Under theoretical framework, work done by various theorists in connection with drug use behavior is discussed. Seldin (1972) in family process theory reviewed the impact of family environment on addictive behavior of adolescents. He concluded that addicts come from unstable family environments which make them emotionally unstable and increase the probability of taking drugs to escape from stress. Lindesmith (1974) in availability theory proposed that the combination of peer pressure and drug availability are the most important factors in initiation of drug use. According to the availability theory, substances are used by addicts because all kinds of drugs are easily available. Due to the easy availability and low prices of drugs consumption by adolescents is escalating at high rate. Social learning theory claims that deviant behaviour of the individual is the result of faulty socialisation which provide positive reinforcement for negative behaviours ( Akers, 1977 ). In group of drug addicts social learning occurs when peers give positive reinforcement or appreciation to drug user ( Bandura, 1977; Kaplan, 1980; Martin & Robbing, 1984). The review of literature also confirmed the major premises of these theories. Researchers have related these perspectives to confirm the objectivity of research

### **Methodology**

In order to explore the causes of heroin addiction qualitative research design was applied. The research process was initiated in June 2015 and completed in June 2016. The study was conducted with 20 males of age group 15-20 in Azad Kashmir and Islamabad. In this age group individuals are more vulnerable to get involve in heroin addiction due to multiple causative factors including stress, peer pressure, curiosity, familial factors and easy availability of heroin. Lennox & Cecchini (2008) reported that average age of users at a first time substance use is less than 20 years. Researcher has selected those heroin addicts who were referred to drug rehabilitation center for intervention. The reason for selecting only male addicts was because people mostly admit male addict members of the family in drug rehabilitation centers. Participants were selected by using purposive sampling method because some heroin addicts were not in position to respond properly and some participants at selected centers were not residents of that area. Permission was sought from the legal authorities in written form to conduct the investigation at the drug rehabilitation centers. Addicts were also requested to sign consent form before starting the interview. 10 informants were selected from 'Drug Rehabilitation Center Muzaffarabad Azad Kashmir' while other 10 were selected from 'Hosla Health Center Islamabad'. The interviews were conducted in office timing between 10:00 am to 2:00 pm for four weeks (two weeks per center). Furthermore, the reason for conducting interviews during office time was to take notes in the presence of office in charge and to avoid any sort of unpleasant situation. The data was collected by conducting in-depth interviews. Views and experiences of the participants were recorded with their consent and field notes were also prepared. Thematic analysis was used to analyze results. After each interview, researcher summarized the main points of the interview to find out

similarities and differences categorize into umbrella themes and sub themes. Reliability and validity was also ensured in the way that researcher has approached the interviewees at two different times and compare their responses at two different times.

## **Findings and Discussion**

After reading the interview transcripts several times, codes were identified and themes were categorised. The basic themes of the study are causes of heroin addiction at personal, familial and societal level, stressful life events, curiosity, peer influence, parental divorce, and lack of parental supervision and easy availability of heroin. The themes are supported by extracts from the responses of the informants.

### **Causes at personal level**

#### ***Stressful life events***

Most of the participants reported stress as the main cause which induced them to use heroin. Some participants encounter with loss, grief, guilt, death of parent/s or parental coldness, lack of love and care, they resorted to heroin addiction as a way of coping with their problems. Substance was discovered to be an integral part of participants' life in order to adjust to stress. This captured in participants voices as follows: *"I tried to commit suicide many times and also used sleeping pills. Finally, I started taking heroin in order to escape from emotional pain"* (participant 3). One participant reported, *"One day I got too depressed and decided to take heroin to become senseless"* (Participant 6). In addition, *"I was raised in disturbed and stressed family environment. My father divorced my mother and I was bound to live in solitude. My sister and me sometimes slept hungry and went to school with an empty stomach. I was overwhelmed by that situation and was feeling helpless. I was stressed and my friends influenced me to use heroin in order to relieve stress"* (Participant 9). Another participant indicated, *"I suffering from depression and sadness, I had no friend, no one wanted to talk to me, I was stigmatized, living with regrets. Heroin gave me the love and attention. I found drugs a reliable source to diminish tension"* (participant 13). Other participant reported, *"My depression got deepened with the passage of time. I snorted heroin in order to deal with depression"* (participant 15); *"That pain was unbearable for me and I was struggling with depression. I approached a drug addict and begged him for the strongest drug and found heroin as a healer"* (participant 20).

Adolescents take support of drugs in order to knock back their stress because they believed that using drugs will help them in dealing with anxiety, low self-esteem, and pain. Youngsters often use heroin as a coping mechanism in order to escape from tensions and different apprehensions of life. In addition to that, they use heroin to momentarily get rid of unwanted thoughts, depression, insecurity and loneliness (Zastrow 2004).

#### ***Curiosity***

In the present study several respondents mentioned curiosity as a reason that motivated them to use heroin. Participants in the present study reported that they used heroin just to experience the taste. They were curious about its flavor and the feelings one have after using it. Participant 7 reported, *"I smoked cigarettes and chars in college only for the sake of fun with the company of my peers. After using chars I was curious to use heroin and I just wanted to taste it"*. Another participant told, *"My step uncle was heroin addict. Observing him regularly I got curious to use it. One day while he was hiding the heroin, I found it and imitated the way he used"* (participant 8). Other participant also emphasized how due to curiosity they have become victim of heroin, *"While passing from desolate area daily I noticed a person smoking heroin over there and got curious to taste it"*(participant 14) ; *"I was naughty and crazy one, my behavior was odd and extreme. I was desperate to do something adventurous. I didn't use heroin because of emotional pain but just for the sake of experimentation"* (participant 17). In present study it is also observed that adolescent is the most vulnerable stage for experimentation with drugs. Most of the participants used heroin in order to experience it. They had novel sensations and stimulation for exploring new ideas. Availability theory explains that heroin is readily available and accessible and its easy availability becomes a contributing factor for adolescents use (Seldin, 1972).

#### ***Peer group influence***

Analysis of the interviews revealed that the peer group is frequently observed as the major cause of heroin abuse among addicts. In the following quotations, participants explained how their friends influenced them to use heroin. *"One day I was depressed, I went to my friend and told him my problem. He asked me to take heroin"* (participant 1); *"My friends asked me to try heroin"* (participant 2); *"I started taking chars, bhang and heroin in the company of my cousin"* (participant 3); *I managed to get and snort heroin with my friends* (participant 7); *"I left home and started living with my friend. There I started snorting heroin my age at that time was 17 years"*. (Participant 10); *"I joined the group of delinquent boys who were older than me, they offered me heroin."* (Participant 11); *"All of my friends were using some sorts of drugs."* (Participant 12). Peer group pressure is one of the major factors influencing individual to get involved in heroin addiction. This study revealed that majority of the respondents started heroin between the ages of 15 to 18 years. At this age adolescents are influenced by their friends they involve themselves in misconduct due to peer pressure. Social learning theory explains that

substance abuse is a deviant behavior learnt through social interaction between the individual and the environment. According to social learning theory adolescents use drugs because they see their parents, peers, and other people using drugs and they imitate them (Bandura, 1997). Participants of the study reported that their friends were using drugs openly in front of them and it was a group culture. Peer influence was the most important factor for initiation of drug use in adolescence period (Oshodin 1981).

### **Causes at family level**

#### ***Parental divorce/separation***

Drug addiction by children is the result of parental separation or divorce (Murkherjee, 1978). Social learning theory postulates that those adolescents are more vulnerable to drug use that observe disputes between parents consistently and turn to drugs to relieve stress (Rice & Dolgin, 2008). Weak associations between parents and children and ignorance of parents recognized as strong causative agents escort children towards drug abuse. One of the participant reported *“My step father beat me daily without any reason. I even thought to commit suicide. The harsh behavior of my step-father was the cause of heroin addiction.”* (Participant 10). Parental divorce was a major reason of indulging in addictive behavior. *“When I was only five years old my mother was divorced. At the age of 17 I started heroin for the first time. My friends influenced me to use substances. Irritating questions were always inquired by people; like why your father has left you? Do you miss your father? There must be a reason to leave his son otherwise no father can leave his son. Due to this Interrogation I became so depressed and I stigmatize myself”* (Participant 2). *“I was raised in disturbed and stressed family environment. My father divorced my mother when I was 12 years old and she married to her cousin. In the company of addicts, I started using heroin to liberate stress”* (participant 9). Children raised by a single parent stand at the risk of constant misguidance and they are more vulnerable. They try to seek direction and support from their peers. Lower family income is another aspect encountered by single parent family which has negative impact on the behavior of juveniles. Due to deprivation of basic needs and deficiency of monitoring they become easy victims of drug addiction (Baumrind 1991).

#### ***Lack of parental supervision***

Inadequate parental supervision is observed as one of the major contributing factors of drug abuse. *“The heroin was introduced to me by a friend, who was also my neighbor. My parents were unaware of my friendship with that particular boy and my habit of using drugs”* (participant 1); *“I was living at my uncle’s house in Muzaffarabad to get education. My parents were living in village. My uncle was heroin addict, I observed him frequently smoking the heroin. Once he offered me a loaded cigarette”* (participant 4); *“I was spending most of the time with friends. No one inquired about my absence from house. I left school and became a heroin addict”* (participant 7); *“My room was not adjacent with the rest of house. My mother never noticed that I am smoking cigarettes and chars. I left home and started living with friends. There I started snorting heroin at the age of 17”* (participant 10); *“I grew up in nuclear family. Both of my parents were govt. employees. All of my friends were using some sorts of drugs. My parents were unaware of my activities.”* (participant 12); *“After passing FSC I got admission in Agha Khan University Karachi in M.B.B.S. Moving to Karachi was a turning point in my life. In Karachi my friends were drug addicts. They pressurized me to smoke the heroin with them. My parents were there to monitor my activities and I was free to do anything”* (Participant 17).

Inadequate parenting care and involvement are risk factors of heroin abuse. Some of the Parents are over obsessed with their work; they do not monitor and supervise their children. They remain in their own comfort zones and never intervene in their affairs (Adeniyi2001). Due to lack of parental monitoring adolescents associate themselves with drug chasing peers and get involved in drug abuse (Seldon 1972).

### **Cause at societal level**

#### ***Easy availability of heroin***

The findings of the study revealed that despite of legal policies the heroin was readily available in different areas. Heroin was purchased and transported from dealers without any monitoring and obstacle. Even though, one of the respondents told that substances were also available in jail.

The role of community is also questionable because no one ever noticed or reported in this context. In addition to that, it was also observed that parents were unaware about the purchase and smuggling of heroin by their children. All the participants informed that heroin was easily available. *“I was bringing heroin from Mansehra in my school bag”* (participant 4); *“I had friendship with a group of heroin abusers and they provided me heroin easily”* (participant 5); *“Heroin was easily available in Muzaffarabad”* (participant 7); *“I brought heroin from ‘karkalla’ which is slum area near Mansehra, Pakistan”* (participant 8); *“I purchased it from local drug dealers directly”* (participant 11); *“Heroin is easily available in Islamabad”* (participant 13); *“I purchased it from ChathaBakhtawar”*(participant 14); *“I purchased it from local dealer”* (participant 15 and 16); *“Heroin was easily available in Barakahu”* (participant 18); *I was taking 1 gram daily and was purchasing it from my village in Islamabad* (participant 19). This is also supported by Nemours Foundation which stated different types



of drugs are easily available. Low prices and easy availability of drugs are the major causes of substance use by adolescents. (Nemours Foundation, 2004). Adolescents approach and use drugs due to the easy availability. Drugs are easily available to individual on the cost of their wealth and health (Lindesmith, 1974). There is a need of proper monitoring to control the flow of substances from one area to another. Smuggling of heroin was also reported by respondents. Heroin trafficking is mostly done with the help of adolescents. It is the prime responsibility of police to check the adolescents especially who travel alone with school bags.

### Conclusion

The primary focus of this research was to uncover the factors responsible for the involvement of an individual in heroin addiction. People attach stigma with addicts, start widening the distance, hating and treating them badly. The findings of the present study will help the people to change their perspective about heroin addicts. Drug addiction should be perceived according to positivist point of view rather than viewing it as a criminal activity. There is need to understand the background factors and causes which influence youth to use heroin. Instead of punishing them, they must be treated with care and counseling should be provided. Qualitative research method has provided an access to different dimensions emerged simultaneously and intensifies our knowledge and understanding. Present study verified the notion of recent researches that when adolescents are not supervised by parents properly, they hang up with bad companionship; seek for excitement which ends up in heroin addiction. Broken families and lack of parental supervision are identified as major familial risk factors of heroin abuse. It is responsibility of educational institutions as well as family to socialize their children to cope with stress and loss. It is the responsibility of whole society to assist addicts in their cessation process. The heroin abuse not only effects addict but also the whole society. The experiences of participants in this study were clearly depicting that they were abusing heroin due to various reasons. This study was conducted in drug rehabilitation centers where individuals were in their recovery process fighting against withdrawal symptoms. They need to be loved, guided and supported after their recovery to refrain themselves from further drug abuse. They may refuse to communicate with people around because of fear of being labelled as heroin addict. It is the responsibility of family, friends and community members to make them feel stress free. This study has achieved its purpose of investigating the causative factors of heroin addiction at individual, familial and societal level.

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